

north shore news

LAUTENS: Talk of a third crossing grows old

[Trevor Lautens](#), contributing writer / North Shore News

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This
JUST IN
Trevor Lautens

Well, that should be the nail in the coffin. Maybe a whole carpenter's apronful of nails.

I speak of the prospects for a North Shore Yes vote in the transit plebiscite, somewhat pushed out of the public mind by fresher disasters.

Still personally debating whether the imperfect proposed improvements outweigh the baggage of an ill-hatched, crassly hyped and geographically tilted plan, I'd guess that media revelations of a half-baked scheme to ban cars on the Lions Gate Bridge in 15 years did a large favour for the No vote on this side of the (still slightly oily?) water.

Especially since this pact in 2000 among the really important powers — the province, City of Vancouver, ICBC and unpopular TransLink (be fair, no transit system anywhere is popular) — arrogantly ignored those most affected: the three North Shore municipalities and their 185,000-odd residents. North Vancouver District Mayor Richard Walton, long experienced in transportation matters, had never even heard of the no-cars agreement.

Which was conditional on a third crossing. This grows old. A third-crossing debate bubbled up in the mid-1980s. The proposal was for a tunnel under the inlet. The bubble burst.

The entrances/exits weren't wanted in anybody's backyard. On this side of the inlet the acceptable grade for motor vehicles would require the tunnel to burrow well up the slopes. Into British Properties, say? Dead in the water.

As for the glorious view approaching the North Shore: You hide it under water and dirt? Brilliant tourism move.

A footnote: Quirkily, the Lions Gate is a bridge North Shoreans love to hate. The bridge's antediluvian three-lane craziness makes a driver's spirits sink when only one is in your favour, but soar when you hit the jackpot of two lanes.

You sweep majestically past a glum line of turtling cars, you're sweeping, they're creeping! O joy! Filling the infantile human need: It's not enough that you must win, others must lose.

Whenever the bridge goes, it'll live in nostalgia and jokey stories. Does the Port Mann Bridge move anyone's emotions?

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Destroying St. Paul's Hospital is bottomless stupidity. Any layman equipped with the projections — that the two elephants in the operating room are that a million people will join Metro Vancouver's population by 2030, and that old people are proliferating like

rabbits — could tell the experts that.

Which should open eyes to the blindingly obvious: **You don't tear down an existing hospital!**

Yes, build the new one (hoping the False Creek flats site on nature's swamp isn't as seismically vulnerable as critic Paul McGown declares).

Sensibly, each would have specific functions as well as some overlapping ones, like emergency departments. One might focus on, say, gerontology and long-term care, the other on obstetrics or gender-specific conditions. Fill in the blanks. I'm a big-picture guy, impatient with details.

The underlying driver of this covertly hatched move is development bucks. Greed. Folly. Shame.

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Of all the hypocrisies of this sinful world, none is greater than this: That school teachers (B.C. Teachers' Federation, always) and university instructors and professors (Capilano University, currently) put their already stressed students through the wringer of threatened strikes — before exams, of all times — while piously proclaiming their concern for said students, their passionate commitment to their education, and all that good fake stuff.

As an exam-writing, part-time UBC student myself in the last four years, I feel deeply for university students. I need no lesson on how grindingly tough their lot is. I denounce the Cap faculty leadership's recent strike scare on the eve of exams as utterly despicable and contemptibly unprofessional.

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Happy birthday: Last Sunday, a gem of a day, there was an indistinguishable murmur, then a gabby conversation in the skies, and in the space of a few minutes the gorgeous sight of a squadron of Canada geese — followed within minutes by five others — over Caulfeild.

The undersigned never feels more the heart-clutch of our huge, grave country, its resurrection from winter, and the paltriness of human affairs than when the long, loose V-formations of these handsome birds announce their confidence that thousands of years have passed, but they and their amazing travels shall not pass away.

Skyward-looking, my wife and I then were drawn to another heritage sight: The glistening white head of the bald eagle who, with a mate perhaps no longer among the living, has reigned for decades over his kingly domain from the top of a grand old tree on our block.

And at the other end of the size spectrum, yes, confirmed: That dodging splash of red on the leafy north side of the house was the returned rufous hummingbird, drinking deeply of the nectar of salmonberry flowers, as welcome as — and what is this, if not? — spring.

With all this avian activity within short minutes, it didn't seem especially strange when a towhee flew into the house.

Trevor Lautens can be reached via email at rtlautens@gmail.com (<mailto:rtlautens@gmail.com>).

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